Tomato

Printed Matter, Jordan Nassar (JN) & Christopher Schulz (CS)

For Shannon Michael Cane, bootlegging was a prompt that allowed him to celebrate the things he loved, and bring together people to share them with. As curator of Printed Matter's book fairs and editions, Shannon oversaw the inimitable NY and LA Art Book Fairs, events that summon a diverse and energetic array of artists, publishers, and fans to share their love of all things printed: books, posters, records, zines, and quite frequently, T-shirts. In his personal practice, Shannon regularly created his own shirts, bootlegging obscure publications, art practices, and logos as a way of illustrating their relevance today. In 2012, he took this practice a step further by launching the first iteration of 'The Bootleg T-Shirt Show', in which he invited artists and designers to create their own bootleg T-shirts to be exhibited and sold at Printed Matter. This exhibition was followed three years later with 'The Bootleg T-Shirt Show II', and then again in late 2017 with the most recent installment.

Shannon sadly passed away before the third show was completed, and his friends New York-based artist/designer/publisher Christopher Schulz and New York based-artist Jordan Nassar completed the exhibition in his stead. Interview by Emmet Byrne (EB).

EB: Why are T-shirts such a big part of the art-book world?

CS: Printed Matter's primary focus is on publications made by artists. Many of those artists self-publish to make their work accessible outside of mainstream systems, and printing on T-shirts is a part of that practice. Although T-shirts are not artist books, they're made in the same spirit, produced in a similar way, and accomplish much of the same thing in terms of distribution and disruption. Especially now, in a digital age, printed shirts are more akin to artist books because they're literally printed matter. At the book fairs, there are T-shirts being sold at practically every other booth, so the printed T-shirt is an instinctive form to this community of artists. The main difference is dissemination—a T-shirt spreads its message more quickly than a zine.

JN: In the self-publishing realm, there's zines, there's posters, and there's T-shirts as the primary vehicles for creativity. Of course, people make all sorts of objects, but T-shirts seem to just always be a part of it. I think the act of making bootleg T-shirts is also about availability. We all gotta wear clothes. I'm constantly having this fight with my husband, as my closet overflows with T-shirts that he perceives as things I rarely wear—that this is like collecting any other piece of art or ephemera, it's about valuing them as a type of artwork. And of course, yes, there is the element of conveying a message. Whether it's just sporting something you like that you think is cool and makes you feel good (T-shirts as fashion);

p. 105: Jordan Nassar, Israeli Black Panther T-Shirt (2015)

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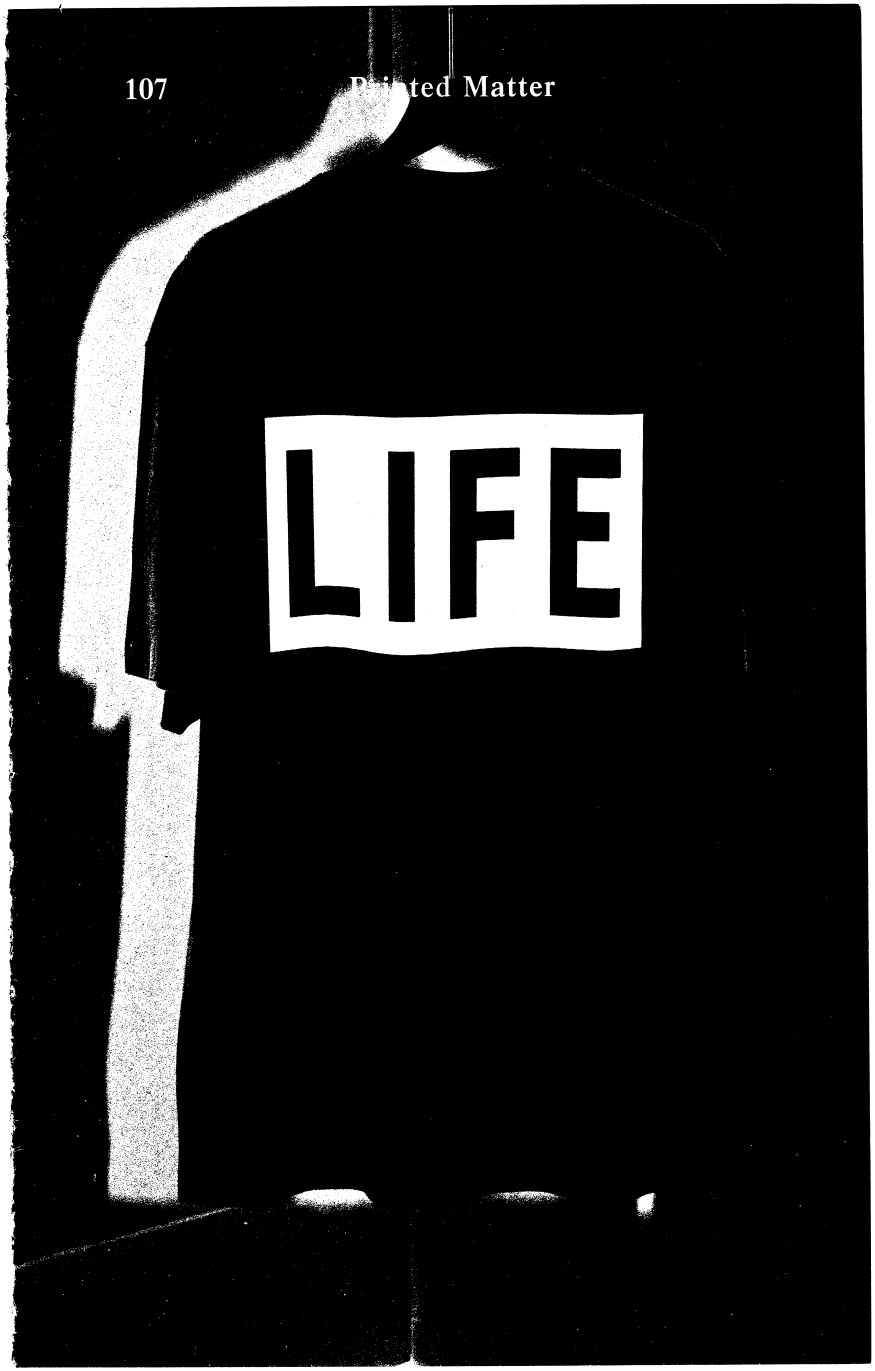
to those "special" shirts that are rare or super precious to you (T-shirts as artwork); to more serious political or socially active statements (T-shirts as message); conveying something is always a part of it. I think these bootlegs are always doing at least one of those things, and sometimes even doing all three at once.

> EB: Would you consider these T-shirts publications? How do you read a T-shirt? Is there a front and a back cover? Is there a subtext? Can you read between the lines?

CS: A lot of artists play with the front and back. The best example is a shirt called Life & Death by Ed Davis. The front is printed with the *LIFE* magazine logo, and the back is printed with the logo of the metal band, Death. The scale of quick reads versus in-depth examination is inherent to all the shows. I personally gravitate toward the in-depth stuff. I get excited when I have an aha moment with something I see. I like to have a connection to the images I wear.

JN: I also think, similar to how zines work, these shirts are about finding people already within our small community that share a very "deep" interest in something very specific. If you make a shirt that is referencing something obscure, and a couple people freak out and love it, then you've found someone that shares a very niche interest of yours—that's a really fun part of it. On the other hand, you can also use the platform to teach people about something they might not be aware of; for example, in 2015 my

p. 107: Ed Davis, Life & Death T-Shirt, front (2015)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bootleg was a rip on the logo of the Israeli Black Panthers, with the classic Black Panther image but juxtaposed with the logo in Hebrew. This was a movement that happened in the 1970s in Israel, a civil rights movement on behalf of "brown" Jews in Israel, largely from Arab countries, and which is something that many don't know about.

EB: How were artists chosen to participate?

CS: This part was 100% Shannon. He always wanted to include artists whose work he admired, and often tapped those in the artist book world, like James Unsworth, an artist best known for his insane and highly explicit drawings of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles fucking each other. Obviously there's some sticky legal stuff there. Marc Hundley and Dean Sameshima are both known for their screen-printed shirts. Hundley usually prints lyrics from pop songs, and Sameshima revives book covers from queer literature, like John Rechy's *Numbers*. Kevin McCaughey (Boot Boyz Biz), based in Chicago, is a regular maker of bootleg tees that often reference underground music, like a Chris and Cosey *Heartbeat* tee that sold out and I'm extremely bitter that I didn't get one! Artists Matt Connors, Andrew Kuo, and Matt Chambers have been featured in all three bootleg shows. The motivation behind the show is rooted in a tradition among a community of artists in Printed Matter's circle who are engaged in counterculture and independent publication.

EB: What does "bootleg" mean to you?

p. 108: Ed Davis, Life & Death T-Shirt, back (2015)

CS: When I think about the word "bootleg" the first thing that comes to mind is "knock-off." But when it comes to the bootleg T-shirts that Shannon crafted and curated—those are presented as print editions. I'm not personally interested in illegal operations or the cache of fashion labels, so for me what's compelling about the bootleg T-shirt is that it's a mode of publication that gets disseminated by the wearer. The first show addressed the question "what is a bootleg?" head-on and resolved that there's no one answer. Shannon welcomed all interpretations. He simply invited artists that he liked, and gave no parameters. This loose approach was key—it left "bootleg" open and allowed each show to exemplify a wide range of approaches: facsimiles, logo mashups, appropriated artworks, fanzine tour shirts, merchandise that never was but should have been, etc.

A few examples of these different bootlegging strategies: the famous Sonic Youth album cover *Goo* by Raymond Pettibon was reinterpreted in Taravat Talepasand's T-shirt as "Islamic Youth;" Andrew Kuo mashed up the Black Flag and Windows 95 logos; JD Samson turned L.L. Bean into "LesBian;" Cali Thornhill DeWitt turned "Purdue," the pharmaceutical company, into a party supply company; Matt Connors printed the graphic from the cover of the 1983 *Gay Areas Telephone Directory*; Frank Rodriguez reprinted the image of a Nob Hill Cinema ad by New Man that appeared in the 1975 issue of San Francisco gay lifestyle magazine, *Vector*, et cetera. The idea of a bootleg T-shirt is simply a prompt to mine culture for ideas that can then be augmented in some way.

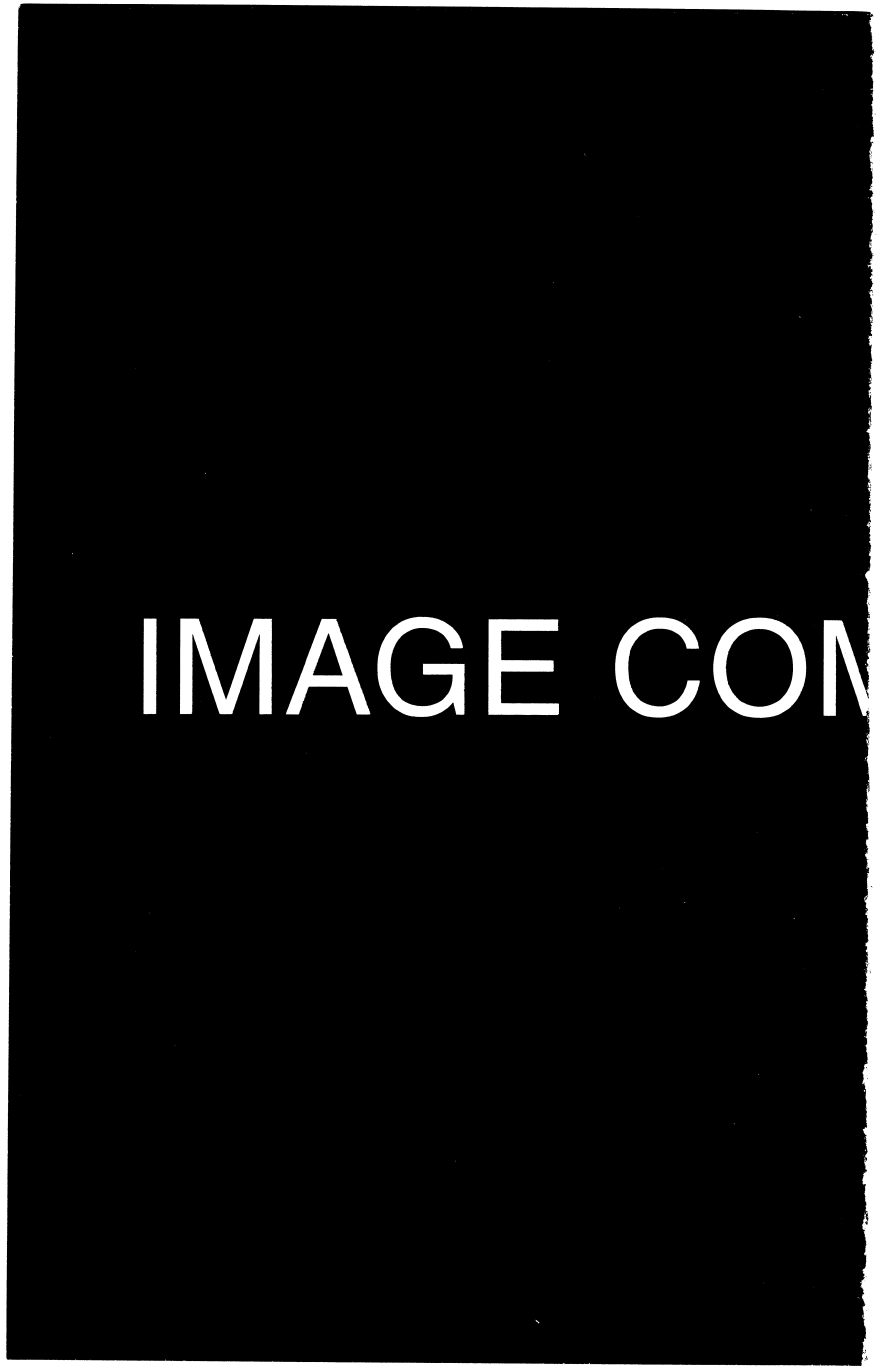
One of my favorites is the Death Factory T-shirt, a Throbbing Gristle remake by Scott Treleaven. This bootleg is one hell of a deep cut. Death Factory was

the name of the Throbbing Gristle recording studio, and in the early days the band made DIY T-shirts that simply said "Death Factory" to look like worker shirts. They were not merchandised, so the reference lives on in old photos.

> EB: What do you think about the state of copyright laws today in terms of creative activities like visual arts, music, performance, fashion, etc.?

CS: It's all very confusing. With music, you can copyright and license a recording. With dance you can't copyright movement but you can copyright choreography on paper. Richard Prince has proven that copyright laws around fine art can be very gray. Social media has blurred the lines when it comes to distribution. Think about a blog service like Tumblr, with a social feed: someone might find an image on the Web and will post it to their blog without citing the source, and it gets reblogged by others, distributed over and over without its original context. The author disappears and the image takes on a life of its own. So we're all engaging in a kind of lawless area when it comes to the digital distribution of images and recordings. That said, it makes sense that the notion of bootlegging has infiltrated all creative platforms.

As far as I know the only copyright dispute we faced with the T-shirt shows was regarding a Tom of Finland bootleg. The artist posted the design to Instagram and the Tom of Finland Foundation saw it and sent a cease-and-desist letter. So that one didn't get produced after all. There was also an Adidas logo that had been appropriated and the artist was very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nervous to submit it. It was off the table for a while, but it went to print at the very last minute.

> EB: It feels like this is a project that connects a variety of different perspectives and subcultures. I know Shannon was responsible in part for bringing this passion for inclusion to the book fairs. Did this spirit live in the T-shirt shows as well? Why do hybrid projects like this—Printed Matter, the book fairs, independent publishing in general—align so closely with diversity, minorities, politics, queer culture, free thinking, transgressive thinking, love, etcetera.?

JN: I think that's the nature of DIY and self-publishing—the whole point of it is availability to everyone. Anyone can make some copies on a copy machine. So it naturally becomes something that we perceive as aligned with diversity, minorities, activist political voices, queer culture—because no one is censoring it, which is so often what is happening in mainstream publishing, fashion, music, media, etc. It's a platform for raw expression.

CS: The bootleg shows represent Shannon's spirit. Shannon was a transgressive-thinking queer (he preferred "homo"). He was the axis of the book fairs, fundraising editions, various Printed Matter exhibitions, and the bootleg shows. Shannon tied them all together. He folded me into the community that he nurtured, and kept me connected to Printed Matter over many years. I'm sure the same can be said for

p. 115: Scott Treleaven, Death Factory T-Shirt (2015)

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many, if not all, of the artists in these shows. The third bootleg show had gotten pretty far under way before he passed. It was important for Jordan and me to see the show to fruition because it was Shannon's final project—a final celebration of the things he loved.

p. 116: Taravat Talepasand, Islamic Youth T-Shirt (2015)
Title page (p. 102): Tom of England bootleg T-shirt designed by Shannon Michael Cane on the occasion of the New York Art Book Fair (2017)